

GIANT FULL-COLOR PINUP OF MR. WRESTLING II

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PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED



The NEW Rick Steamboat:

"I'VE TURNED
MY RAGE INTO
VIOLENCE!"



Atlas Discovers...
THE SECRET
BEHIND
ERNIE LADD'S
FINGER
OF DEATH!

Florida Titleholder
Barry Windham:
CHAMPION UNDER A
CLOUD OF
CONTROVERSY

BOB BACKLUND PUT
ME IN THE HOSPITAL
By FRED BLASSIE



KING'S COURT

By Peter King



The United States heavyweight championship now belongs to Roddy Piper, but that could be temporary. The NWA is investigating Ric Flair's charge that Piper used a foreign object to gain the victory, and its findings could reverse the decision.

IT SEEMED LIKE a dream, so unreal. The news that Roddy Piper had beaten Ric Flair for the U.S. heavyweight title caused everyone in the office to walk around in a daze.

"How is that possible?" asked

Bill Apter. "I mean, we didn't even rate the guy, did we? And now he's got to be considered second-best only to Race."

Steve Farhood, just returning to the office from New Orleans, propped his feet up on his desk



Piper tries to pull Flair out of the ring by his hair. Roddy doesn't think twice about using illegal maneuvers.

and laughed. "What an upset," he repeated over and over.

I put through a person-to-person call to our Mid-Atlantic correspondent to confirm the news. Yes, it was true. Roddy Piper was indeed the new U.S. heavyweight champion.

Shaking my head in disbelief, I walked over to the microfilm file and pulled out everything we have on Piper. Included in his file are newspaper clips from virtually every one of his major bouts since he broke into pro wrestling five years ago. I asked my secretary to brew a pot of coffee. I knew it would be a long night looking over the file. But somewhere, I hoped, there would be a clue to this spectacular upset.

It took nearly six hours to view all of Piper's file. When I was finished, I looked down at the notes I had been taking while viewing the microfilm. A few patterns began to develop.

Piper vs. Mil Mascaras, 1976: Rookie Piper controls much of the bout, but loses after committing a blatant mistake. Inexperience.

(Continued on page 51)

RINGSIDE

With Bill Apter



Ric Flair almost takes the match with a flying body press, but fails to hold Piper down for the three-count. According to Flair's allegations, Piper won the match and the U.S. title with the use of a foreign object. Piper, of course, denies the charge.

ROWDY RODDY PIPER is the new United States Heavyweight champion, but he is far from being the *undisputed* champion. Former champion Ric Flair has filed a complaint with the NWA claiming, "Piper hit me with something hard, some sort of weapon that knocked me unconscious. The next thing I knew he was leaving the ring with the belt."

NWA President Jim Crockett informs PWI that the governing board of the NWA will review the films of the match and see if any action will have to be taken against Piper.

Gino Hernandez' manager Gary Hart recently made a comment that has irritated many fans and one very popular masked wrestler. "Being like Mil Mascaras is easy," he said. "The guy has no talent. All he does is jump around the ring to confuse his opponent. Then he cheats and wins the match."

Following the remark, Hart, who has an open contract in Austin, Texas, arenas, found Mil Mascaras' name scratched next to his for a wrestling match. To make a long story short, Hart found out that Mil is a bit more talented than he thought. He also found out Mil does not cheat; he doesn't have to. Mil wrestled scientifically and whipped the loudmouth Hart.

Georgia Heavyweight champion Tony Atlas was severely handicapped in his last NWA title match against Harley Race with ligament damage in his left knee.

(Continued on page 52)

DRESSING CLOTHES

By Stu Saks



Fred Blassie shows off Hulk Hogan's bicep measurement. Despite his awesome size and impressive victory list, Hogan has not yet had a shot at Bob Backlund's WWF belt.

HULK HOGAN IS, quite obviously, a very disturbed man. He's not saying much about it, but sitting in the same room with him, you can sense that he has something to say. He wants to open up to someone and spill out all those thoughts, but he just can't.

For the first time since I've known him, Hogan's eyes don't reflect the violence that dominates his life. They are sad.

And when they look at you, they almost talk. He doesn't tell you what's wrong. But his eyes are begging you to guess.

You really don't have to guess, though. All you have to do is look at the record book under Bob Backlund's WWF title defenses. The list includes such names as Tor Kamata, Nikolai Volkoff, Killer Khan, and Stan Hansen—all Fred Blassie protégés. Hulk Hogan, who

even his worst enemies would admit is at least as good as any of them, has not had an opportunity to wrestle Backlund since coming to the East Coast over a year ago.

"The record book doesn't lie," said Hogan, his eyes aimed at the floor.

"Care to talk about it?" his visitor asked.

"Can't," Hogan replied. "No comment."

By no means is Hogan's "no comment" a denial. In fact, if he were not upset, there would be nothing to stop him from saying so. He is upset. Very much so. But he is playing it cool, trying to avoid any kind of confrontation with Blassie. Yet, in a roundabout way, Hogan explained why he is refusing comment.

"I'm tired of hearing of athletes running to the press with all their problems," he said. "Look at Earl Campbell, the football player. He's not making the money he thinks he should make, being the best running back in the NFL, so the first thing he does is try to embarrass the Houston Oilers' management by crying to the press. It's like blackmail. All Campbell is trying to do is turn public opinion in his favor.

(Continued on page 54)

A—ON—ASSIGNMENT

BY STEVEN FARHOOD

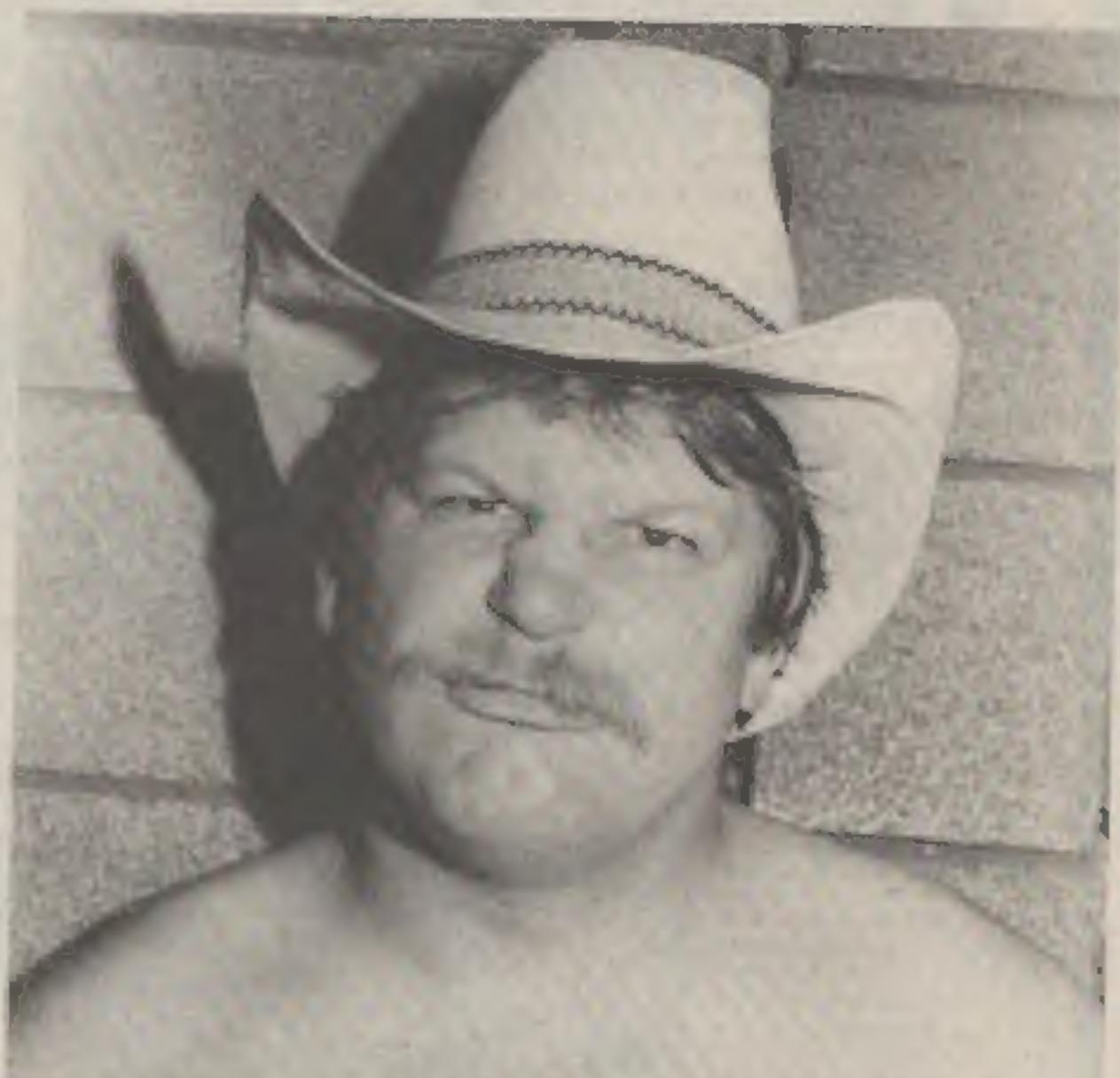
DESPITE WHAT MATT BROCK may think, wrestling is not my entire life. When he storms into my office every month and tells me to make the next plane to Syria or Tokyo or Mongolia, he thinks I'm able to drop everything I have planned, go away for a week or so, and pick up as usual when I return. It's not always that easy, but it's my job so I do it and I don't complain.

Every once in a while Brock is overcome by a wave of compassion. It generally happens when he receives his weekly delivery of a case of Johnny Walker Black. Anyway, this month he gave the little Lebanese kid a break; no long trip, no week away from home.

"Farquar," he said (when he's had a few, which is most of the time, he often gets my name wrong), "Stan Hansen's in the WWF again. Get me a story. Follow him, talk to him, sneak into his hotel room, just make it different. And I want the story in five days."

I was relieved. A New York City story at last! Seems like Morgenstein and Saks get all of those. And I wouldn't have to cancel the basketball game I had scheduled for my team, a group of neighborhood 15 and 16 year olds which I had coached for two years. They were to play a boys club from Times Square. It was a big game. For first place.

I thought about an angle for



It is not often that Stan Hansen is caught speechless. But when Steve Farhood's young basketball team questioned his morality, Hansen had nothing to say. He did say later that he would not be making any more personal appearances.

the Hansen story. Nothing came to me. Writer's block. I thought for about two straight hours. Then it hit me like Hansen's fanat: Why not tie in Hansen with my basketball team? Some of them are big wrestling fans. One kid, Robbie Kennedy, would rather meet a superstar like Hansen than Dr. J himself.

I reached Hansen at his hotel. I told him about my team. He had a match in New Jersey that night, but if I could get the team

together at about four o'clock, he'd be glad to talk to them for a half-hour. It was ideal. My team played at six. Meeting and talking with Hansen might really pump them up.

I assembled my kids at the local recreation center at 3:30. Then I told them. Robbie Kennedy almost through himself out the window with excitement. His brother, Sean, the smallest player on my team, began to throw flying dropkicks

(Continued on page 50)

THE MORGENSEN REPORT.....

By Gary Morgenstein

WHAT NEXT?

A man of Masked Grappler's warped sensibilities surely won't quit at conquering Louisiana. At this writing, it appears the Masked Grappler will overcome and destroy all competition. But then what? What does he do next? What state does he invade next? My thinking centers around Georgia, where Masked Grappler might try and realize his oft-desired dream: destroying Mr. Wrestling II.



MASKED GRAPPLER

DESPERATION!



NICK BOCKWINKEL

Frustration gnaws at Nick Bockwinkel, keeps him awake at night, consumes his very soul. Bockwinkel has always tested frustration by smashing it into a million little pieces. But

Bockwinkel can't just smash the source of his newest frustrations. It eats away at Bockwinkel that Verne Gagne is AWA champion. Bockwinkel has tried all manner of methods to unseat Gagne. None have worked. Apparently Bockwinkel has seized upon a last, frighteningly desperate act. Backed by gold, Bockwinkel is offering \$20,000 to any AWA rulebreaker, or any man for that matter, who will stop Gagne for him. Bockwinkel leaves the method vague, as well as where this "hit" may occur. Bockwinkel doesn't care if it's within the squared circle or not. All he wants is Gagne out of the way and his title back. And this amoral genius was once champion?

POOR BARRY

I feel sorry for Barry Windham. Instead of receiving accolades for his amazing successes in such a short career, Windham spends most of his time defending his capture of the Florida heavyweight title from Dory Funk Jr. To recollect all the minute details of that match's ending would only further divert



BARRY WINDHAM

attention from Windham's impressive achievements. For one so young and inexperienced, no criticism intended, Windham has accomplished a great deal. Many would say the Florida title is the most competitive state championship in the nation. Yet Windham managed to defeat a wily, devious veteran like Dory Funk Jr. Enough about the "controversial" ending. More about Barry Windham.

If you wish to contribute to Shocket's mailbag, send your letters to:

TOP ROPE
Box 48
Rockville Centre, N.Y.
11571

OFF THE
ROPE

By Dan Shocket

THE FANS OF Rick Steamboat once again object to being called morons. I suppose they got someone to read my column to them. I would appreciate it if the readers would also read this: I will not publish any letter written about Rick Steamboat. I enjoy reading them, as I enjoy reading any foolishness. So, if your wish is to keep me amused, send those cards and letters. If you wish to get your letter published, write about some other wrestler. Your third choice is to keep your inane drivel to yourselves.

Dear Mr. Shocket:

As a parent of a fellow reader, I feel it is my duty as a guardian to force you to stop praising sadists. I don't know what your problem is, but an end must be put to it. If youngsters in America go 'on thinking it's okay to like an individual who cannot be trusted around the corner, this country is in pretty bad shape. Personally, Dan, you're smart enough to know you're doing wrong. A petition to rid wrestling of your last-rate column is being dug up.

TIM PINCKNEY
Auburn, NY



According to Dan Shocket, Ken Patera has every right to complain about his losses to Harley Race and Pedro Morales. Patera claims the referees, Lou Thesz and Pat Patterson, were partial to his opponents.

Dear Mr. Pinckney,

It is your duty as a parent to discuss various ideas with your child. It is not your duty to inhibit free speech, burn books, or blacklist writers. Your lust for silencing people who disagree with you is far more dangerous than anything I could possibly write. Shame!

Dear Mr. Shocket:

Ken Patera is a big bag of wind. Every time he loses a title, he blames it on the referee.

When Harley Race beat him, he blamed it on Lou Thesz. Then, when he lost the Intercontinental title, he blamed it on Pat Patterson.

I think you should stop

calling Patera a champion and start calling him a liar.

MICHAEL MINOMIYA
Queens, NY

Dear Mr. Ninomiya:

Ken Patera is a great wrestler and champion. He had every right to question the referees' decisions in both matters. Neither Thesz nor Patterson could be expected to be fair to him. In both those matches, it was two against one. Patera wasn't beaten, he was robbed.

Dear Turkey Shocket:

How can you call John Studd an exceptional wrestler? Everyone knows he is one of the

most ruthless rulebreakers in the AWA. You're nuts if you call us lucky to have him here. His illegal heartpunch, which has been banned in many states, has given him many questionable victories over unwary scientific opponents. Studd used a closed fist for his heartpunch, which makes it even more devastating.

By the way, Shocket, you know what we do with our grain here in the Wisconsin farm country? We shock it. But first it has to be thrashed. You should be thrashed, Shocket.

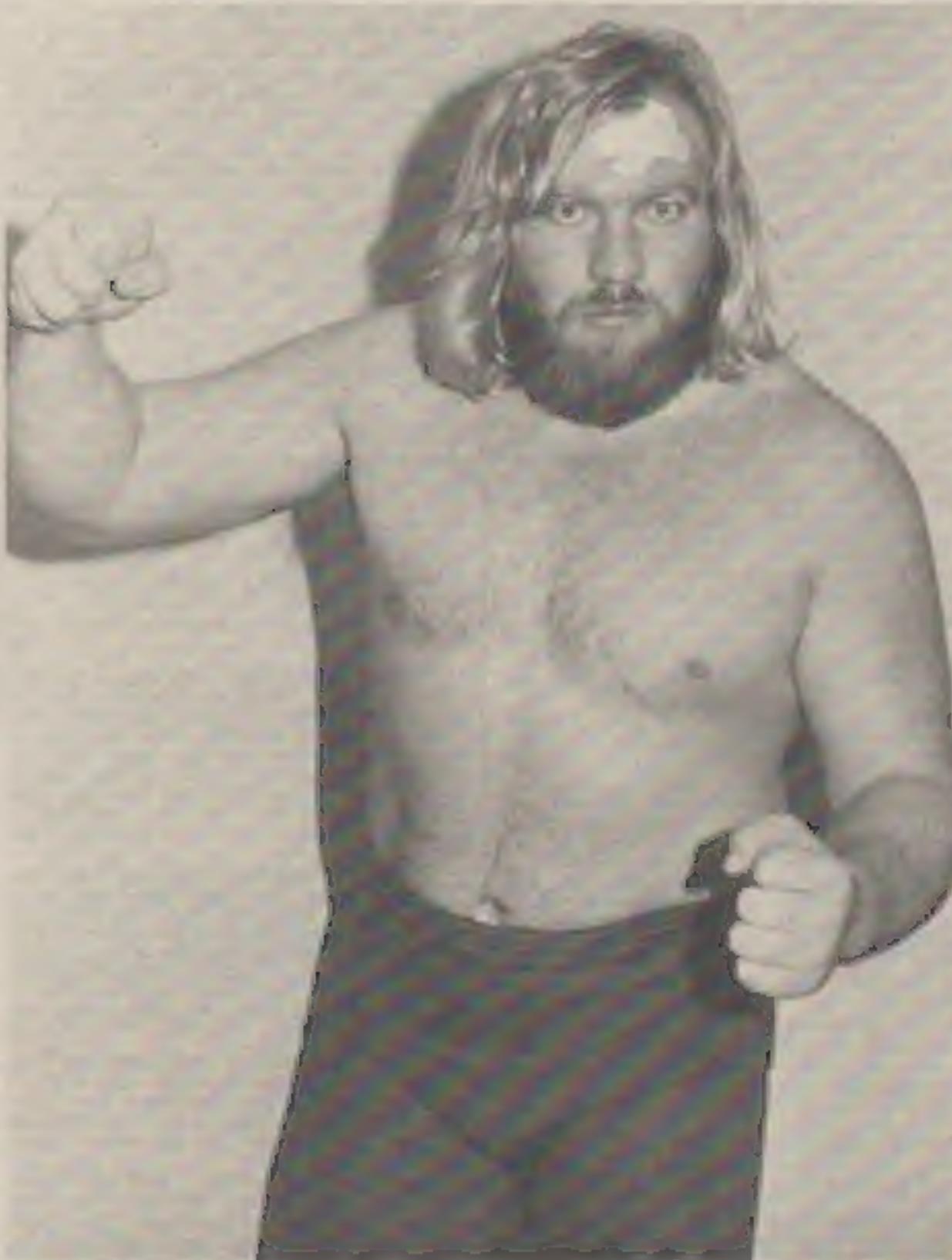
ERNIE SPEARS
Balsam Lake, WI

Dear Birdbrain Spears:

Any professional wrestler who is unwary of his opponent's main weapon deserves to be pummeled. Studd is tough, perhaps brutal, but is brilliant. You may disagree with his methods, but you cannot deny his greatness. The AWA is lucky to have his greatness. Finally, a great man is about to say, "Any man named Spears shouldn't chuck around surname insults."

Dear Mr. Shocket:

I'm sick and tired of you and your rulebreakers saying that they will defeat Bob Backlund for the WWF belt. They should know they can't. The kid's too



Though his tactics are questionable, Shocket feels John Studd's success cannot be disputed.



Bob Backlund is due to lose his WWF title, Shocket believes. And he hopes, for the good of wrestling, that it happens soon.

tough.

He can beat up bums like Larry Zbyszko, Ken Patera and Hulk Hogan. So give credit where credit is due. Your rule-breakers will never defeat Bob Backlund.

JEFFREY BAIRD
Virginia Beach, VA

Dear Mr. Baird:

If you learn nothing else from life, learn that there is no such thing as "never." Sooner or later, someone will defeat Backlund. Everyone is eventually defeated. For the good of wrestling, I hope that eventuality comes quickly. □

**Every month, three reporters from
PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED
will participate in an
incisive press conference with
a top wrestling star.
The questions will be demanding.
And the answers will reveal
the innermost thoughts of
the giants of the sport**

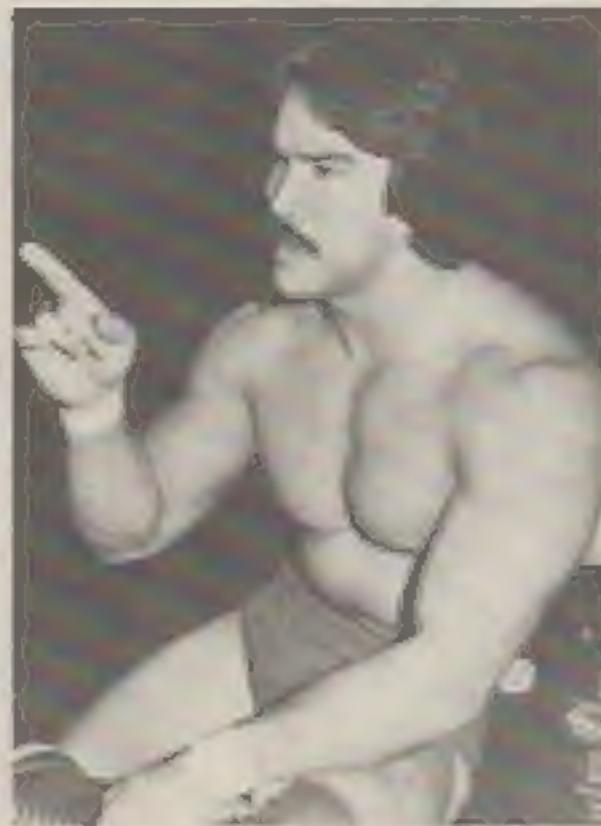
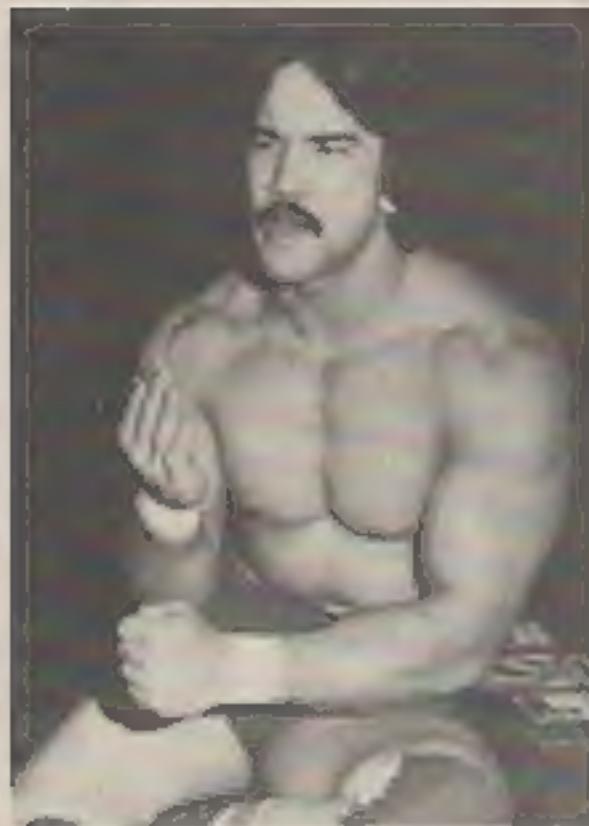
**PRESS
CONFERENCE**

**RICK
STEAMBOAT**



(His name evokes visions of superstardom. All a fan must do is proclaim the name of Rick Steamboat and a violent portrait of barely contained savagery leaps to mind. Steamboat is at once gracious, yet rough. For the longest time, Steamboat has fought a barely successful battle against his own raging temper. But all that seems to have changed, as has Steamboat's own image, both private and public. In this month's "Press Conference," Steamboat discusses his startling changes with Managing Editor Bill Apter and Associate Editors Gary Morgenstein and Dan Shocket.)

"For too long I've allowed my temper to get the best of me. I mean, how many times can a guy get disqualified? It was my own damn fool fault. I have the final say over myself. I determine my own destiny."



BILL APTER: How does it feel to be back in America after your two-month visit to Japan?

RICK STEAMBOAT: Very strange. I'm still not completely used to my surroundings.

APTER: Why?

STEAMBOAT: Well, I went through some real heavy changes while there.

GARY MORGENSEIN: Like?

STEAMBOAT: Just, well, I changed my entire philosophy of life.

DAN SHOCKET: Who influenced you to go to Japan?

STEAMBOAT: What do you mean?

SHOCKET: Sir, in all honesty, wasn't it the likes of Hussein Arab and Greg Valentine who scared you out of the Mid-

Atlantic area.

STEAMBOAT: Now, Dan, that's exactly the sort of question which once would have triggered a violent and irrational temper tantrum. But no more. That's part of my change.

MORGENSEIN: If you'll explain, Rick, you'll find a majority listening attentively.

STEAMBOAT: Well, Gary, for too long I've allowed my temper to get the best of me. I mean, how many times can a guy get disqualified? It was my own damn fool fault. I have the final say over myself. I determine my own destiny. And I had to learn how to harness my rage. I've turned my rage into violence.

MORGENSEIN: Which you

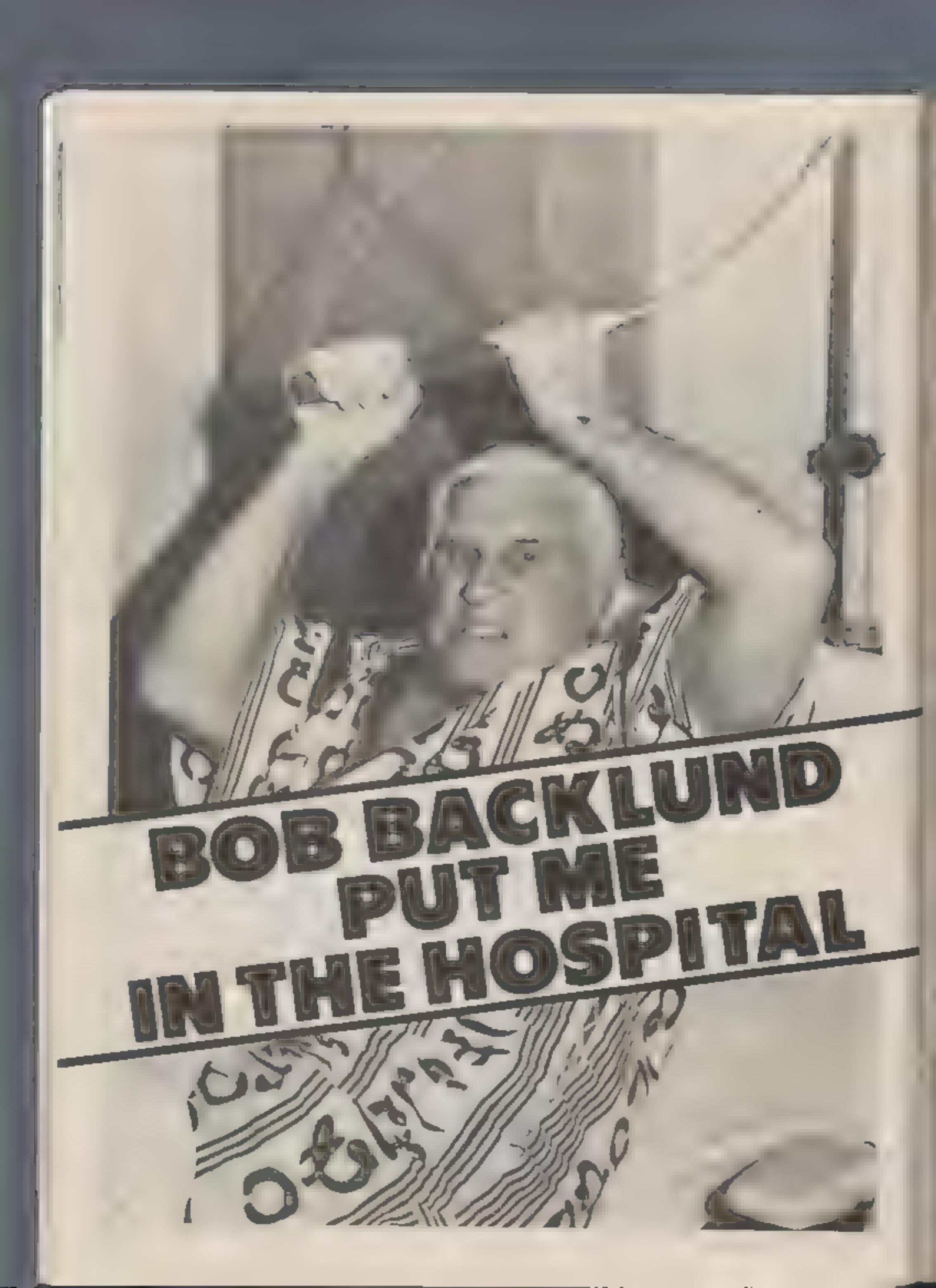
did in Japan?

STEAMBOAT: Yes. As fans might know, I'm a student of the martial arts. Unfortunately, I committed the worst of sins, that is, using the physical skills, the moves and all without ever incorporating the philosophy of the art. That was a sin. You cannot do one without knowing and understanding the other.

APTER: What do you know now?

STEAMBOAT: I understand peace and tranquility. I understand how tidal waves can rage beneath the surface, at once shaking the earth, at once unmoving. A great Japanese philosopher, the fabled and beautiful monk called Tsu Chu,

(Continued on page 62)



BOB BACKLUND
PUT ME
ON THE HOSPITAL

By Fred Blassie

I AM LYING here in the hospital. Yes, don't cry, my fans, Fred Blassie, Classy Fred Blassie, unparalleled genius of the wrestling world, survived this sadistic, cheap attack only because of my strength and courage.

But I want all the world to know who put me here. I want the entire wrestling world, all you pencil-necked geeks and four-eyed fans and dumb-looking referees and lying, ugly wrestlers to know the real truth, the real story, the ultimate truth.

Arnold Skoaland and Bob Backlund attacked me, caught me from behind, threw me to the ground and pummeled me, putting me in this here hospital bed. Yes, they did, fat-boy Skoaland and his stupid stooge Backlund snuck up outside the arena, jumped me from behind and put me in this hospital bed.

My fingers are starting to hurt from the fury of my wrath on this here typewriter. I have to slow down, control my anger and simply, in a calm, reasonable manner tell the world what kind of cheap vermin and trash Backlund and Skoaland are.

It was a typical night and I'd enjoyed another glorious evening of combat in the ring. After my wrestler, due totally to my brilliant leadership, did indeed thrash his foe leaving him a dead hulk in the ring, I showered and dressed.

Fred Blassie was about to step out on the town. You know how the dames love Blassie. You know how I can walk anywhere in the world, in New York, in Brazil, in Thailand, and this face, this mind, this body, is grabbed by millions of



Blassie had the telephone company establish a four-way call among Hulk Hogan, Killer Khan, Stan Hansen, and himself to discuss what measures they would take to avenge the alleged parking lot attack by Bob Backlund and Arnold Skoaland.

This firsthand story might shock the WWF. Fred Blassie claims Arnold Skoaland and Bob Backlund attacked him in the parking lot. Blassie has all the medical proof he needs. He has doctors to back up his claims. But only Blassie saw this attack. There were no witnesses. Or were there?

broads and wanted by fans for personal appearances, to run for office, to make blessings, kiss babies, whatever, the name of Blassie is legendary and everyone knows that

Especially fat boy Skoaland and Howdy Doody Backlund. They cannot stand my wonderful style of wrestling. For years, fat boy Skoaland has been jealous of me. He tried to have me blacklisted from wrestling, by passing foul rumors I cheated, I did this, I did that, that little tub of lard is only jealous of me because I'm better looking, I have a better body, a better face, more hair, more talent, more brains, and better wrestlers than him. It eats away at Skoaland for me to enjoy the respect of the entire world.

As for Backlund, I almost wish I could hate him. But I feel more sorry for him than anything else. He's a mindless wimp who unthinkingly obeys every word of

Skoaland, the every command of fat boy Skoaland Backlund hasn't had an original thought in his whole life. He's nothing but a farm boy with hay for brains and manure for guts.

And that's why I turned the bum down when he first came into pro wrestling. He wanted to come under my wing, hah, imagine that, Blassie managing a loser like Backlund, a fool, a yokel, I'd rather be dead.

But that stuck in Backlund's craw for a long time. He didn't like the idea of getting rejected, he knew, deep down, that fat boy Skoaland would ruin his career.

So you had yokel Backlund, a big, dumb farmhand filled with resentment and hate, and fat boy Skoaland, a tub of lard with mozzarella cheese for brains, jealous of Blassie, hating Blassie, knowing he could never equal me.

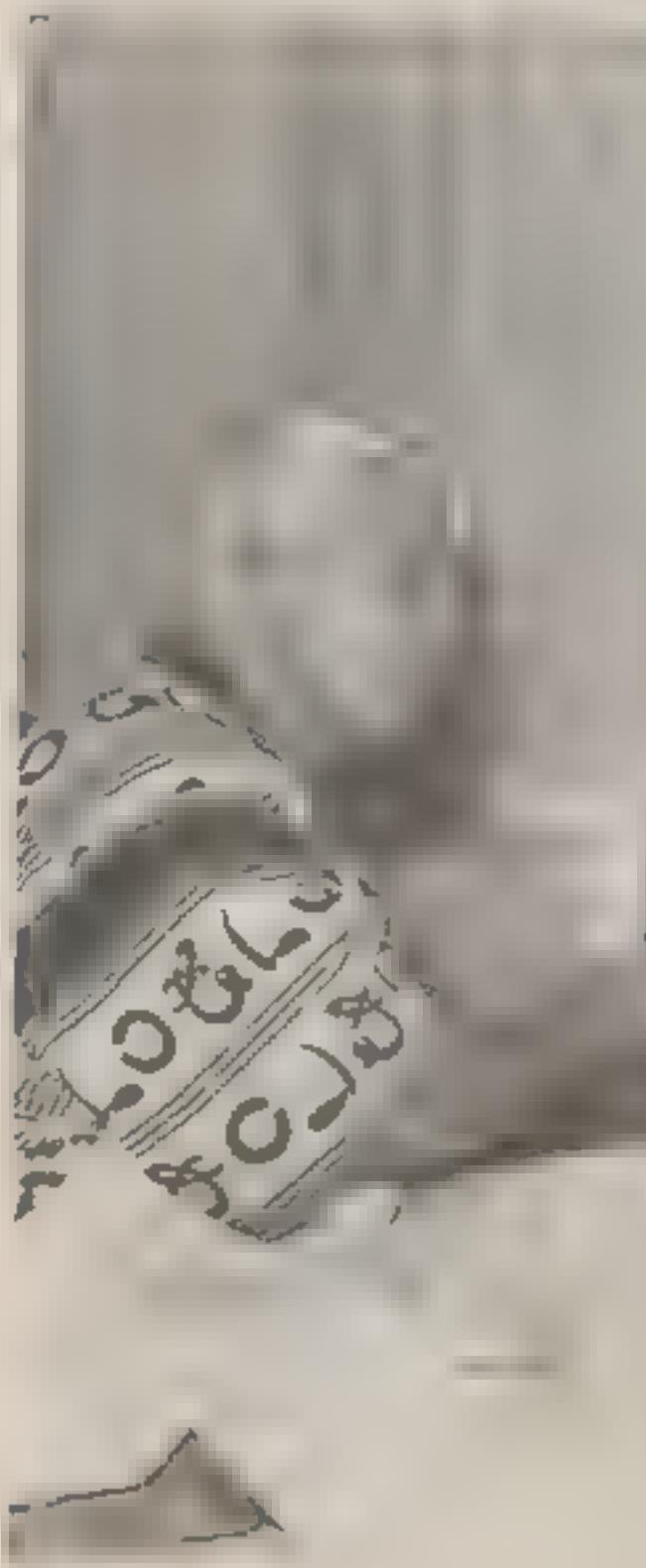
And what do they do? They lay in wait like two vermin rats in the night. They wait until I get out of the arena, sign the millions of autographs from my adoring fans, go to my car, and they jump me. Backlund grabs me from behind and Skoaland starts punching at me. I fight back, kick Skoaland in the stomach, whirl around and am about to get Backlund when I feel a horrible pain in the left side of my back. They slashed me back there. I fell down, unable to move, thinking this was it, they had won, they had finally whipped me and stomped me. Luckily, a security guard arrived on the scene and they ran away.

So that's how I ended up in this hospital bed. I didn't want to press charges. I told the cops that Fred Blassie has his own brand of vengeance, that Blassie doesn't need any help, that Blassie knows who he has to take care of and how, and that it was just too bad for them.

Yes, Arnold Skoaland and Bob Backlund put me in this hospital bed. And they'll pay for that treachery with their lives. □



Blassie has one of his bandages removed to show one of the injuries he suffered (above). Fred points out one of his alleged attackers to a nurse (below).



WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

Every month, our reporters will compile wrestlers' most revealing quotes. Often catching the grapplers with their guards down, our reporters will work endlessly in obtaining interesting quotes on a variety of subjects.

ERNIE LADD

"I do whatever I want because I don't have a higher authority to answer to. A King can do whatever he wants. A King can order all his subjects to lie in a swamp with their feet in the air for three days, if he wants. But I am kind and will not order such a thing. Today."



ROBERT BACKLUND

"There is but one man, and one man only, who has the cunning, who has the skill, who has the size and the courage, yes, you can underline courage to not only defeat but to destroy Robert Backlund. And that man, fortunate enough to have me as a manager, is Sgt. Slaughter."



HARRY GORDON

"The Freebirds, Inc. have made wrestling history. We have shown that three men can wrestle better than two. We have shown the mugs and the wimps and the fools of the world what we stand for and how far we are willing to go. And we are going to the top, never to be dislodged."



MARSHALL LAWLESS

"Killer Karl Kox is typical of the washed-up bums I have to wrestle since I have no competition otherwise. I think fans would prefer to see me wrestle myself instead of the clumsy oaf Kox stumble around the ring falling and tripping over his own feet. But rest assured, Kox will be gone very, very soon."



Continued on page 66



**Florida
Titleholder
Barry Windham**

**CHAMPION
UNDER A
CLOUD OF
CONTROVERSY**

Just Barry Windham's luck. Throughout his brief career, Windham has kept himself on the straight and narrow. He avoided the easy path of rule-breaking. He wanted to do it his way. Now that he finally won the Florida heavyweight title, his reign is clouded by controversy. Windham's victory

IT SHOULD HAVE been the greatest night in Barry Windham's life. He was the new Florida State champion. From promising newcomer, he'd vaulted to top contender for the NWA championship. It should have been the greatest night in Barry Windham's life.

As Barry lay sleepless on his motel bed, a sour smile twisted his lips. His title might prove more of a burden than an honor. Instead of being considered a hero, the fans might call him a coward. It was one of the worst nights in Barry Windham's life. Barry knew the worst was yet to come.

It had started so well Barry signed to challenge Dory Funk Jr. for Funk's Florida championship. To combat the wily veteran, Barry sought the advice of his friend, Jack Brisco. Over the years, Brisco had battled

Funk many times. Their best brawls had become legend. There was no better man to consult than Jack Brisco.

The two men discussed strategy for days. Barry felt he knew Funk better than he knew himself. When he told this to Brisco, Jack warned, "Don't kid yourself. Nobody really knows Funk. He's tricky, maybe even a genius. He also knows more ways than anyone else to protect a title. To beat him, you'll have to be at your best. And more than that, you'll have to be lucky."

Lying in bed after it was all over, Barry thought, "I was lucky, all right. I had good luck and I had terrible luck. A great night for all kinds of luck."

The match began with the ferocity of a tornado. Both men battled brilliantly. Maneuvers were executed

perfectly, many with devastating results. Both men administered and absorbed brutal punishment. For the first 10 minutes neither man could sustain an advantage.

Then, Barry took control. It was a magnificent exhibition of wrestling virtuosity. Funk had to use all his genius to keep from being pinned. Then Dory began to use more than genius.

What followed was perhaps the most subtle rule-breaking in wrestling history. Neither the fans nor the referee could spot it. Only one man knew Funk was taking unfair advantage. Jack Brisco watched and seethed. He saw Barry's chance for the title disappear.

After nearly 45 minutes of battling, both men were exhausted. A missed maneuver by Windham saw Funk

(Continued on page 64.)



Dory Funk Jr. appears to have Barry Windham in perfect position for his spinning toe hold (above), but Barry found an escape. Windham has not been able to escape the controversy of his victory, and many feel he did not deserve a shot with NWA champion Harley Race (opposite left) because of the controversy.

Tony Atlas Discovers...

Atlas brilliantly rejects Ladd's thumb with his powerful left arm!



THE SECRET BEHIND ERNIE LADD'S FINGER OF DEATH!

THE LETTER ARRIVED three days before the match Tony Atlas opened it, even though he knew what it would say.

Like every opponent of Ernie Ladd's, Tony had written to the commissioners about Ladd's

bandaged thumb. The gargantuan grappler says he swaths the thumb in bandages to protect it. A football injury has left it permanently damaged. Tony knows that Ernie uses the tightly bandaged thumb as a weapon. He drives it hard into

opponent's throats.

So Tony had written to the wrestling commission demanding the thumb be examined. The commission has received hundreds of such letters. To each they admit there is nothing they

PHOTOS BY STU SAKS

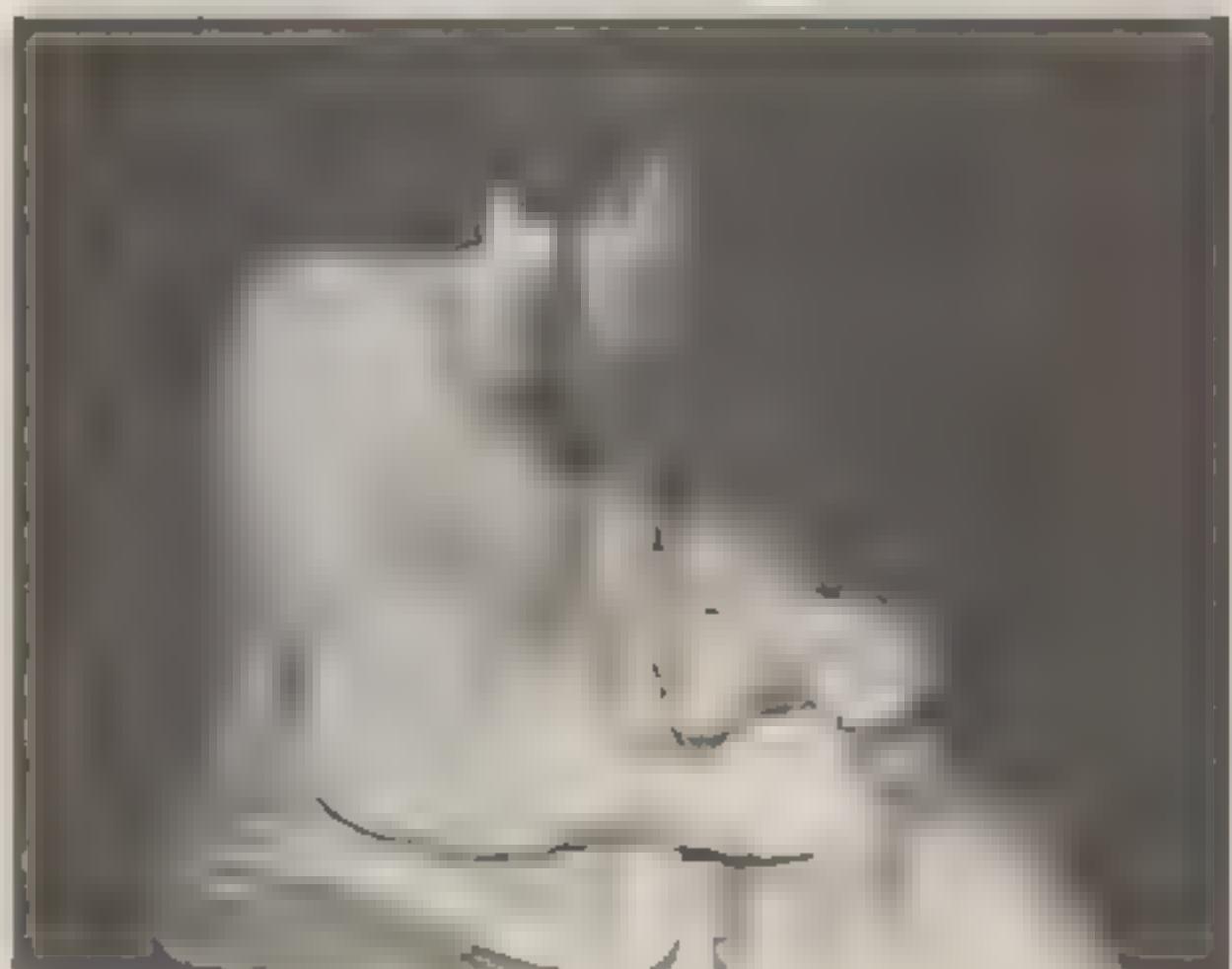


Like all great adventurers, Tony Atlas has no fear. He knows there are certain mysteries he must confront. He knows of his responsibility to the rest of mankind. He knows that, sometimes a man must be willing to face death in order to live

can legally do. The rules state the commission cannot examine a wrestler against his will. Every wrestler has the right to treat himself as he sees fit. Further, it would be impossible to determine the extent of injury, if any, without weeks of testing. There was no time for that. Legally and practically, there was nothing the commission could do.

Tony knew that was what they would say. Yet, every wrestler who goes against Ladd feels obligated to try to change the commission's decision. Commissioners don't know the agony of being jabbed with that bandaged thumb. It tears at the throat, closing the windpipe and batters the Adam's apple. Maybe if they could feel Ladd's attack they'd change their minds.

So Tony knew he'd have to take Ladd and the bandaged thumb. He



Ladd tries to defend himself as Atlas drives an elbow into his head (top); Ernie takes advantage of his tremendous height advantage to block the referee's view from the illegal use of his thumb (above)



Atlas effectively used flying maneuvers to counter Ladd's height. Leaping high in the air, Tom traps his foe in a flying headlock. Ladd dumped Atlas over his back to escape the hold.

had to devise some way to combat it. That wouldn't be easy.

For the next three days, Tony locked himself in the gymnasium. If he was devising a strategy, no one could figure it out. It appeared as if he was simply doing series upon series of exercises.

"He'll be in great shape," a spectator remarked, "for Ladd to batter him."

A friend added, "What else can he do? No one has been able to defend against the loaded thumb."

The night of the match, Ladd arrived at the arena with his thumb bandaged. With a huge smile covering his face, Ernie claimed, "The old thumb has sure been acting up. People don't appreciate how painful it is. It's an act of courage for me to even come to the arena. You know, the taping doesn't stop the pain. It only keeps the thumb from getting worse."

"I know some people think I tape the thumb to use it as a weapon. Those people all belong to a single group—losers. Because of the tape I can't grab or pull or clutch effectively. With those handicaps, why shouldn't I use the thumb as a weapon? It's only fair," concluded Ladd, laughing merrily. He knew better than anyone how dangerously mobile he is when wrestling. The tape has never stopped him from doing anything.

In his dressing room, Tony Atlas was silent. He didn't seem to hear the friends wishing him luck. Lost in concentration, Tony was marshalling all his strength for the coming battle.

The moment arrived. The two battlers stared at each other from across the ring. The bell sounded. The match began.

Tony was cautious. Ladd sensed something was in the works, but he recklessly attacked anyway. The two men locked in the center of the ring. In close, Ladd smashed the taped thumb into Tony's windpipe. Atlas reeled backwards.

(Continued on page 67)

CLOSE-UP



WHENEVER ONE THINKS of a man representative of all that is good and decent and honorable in professional wrestling, the name of Mr. Wrestling II comes to mind . . . Exploded on the pro scene in the early '70s in the Georgia area

His early battles of distinction were against Terry Funk and Professor Toru Tanaka . . . His early mentor was Tim "Mr. Wrestling" Woods, who met and instantly trusted II to become the second Mr. Wrestling of the sport . . . Most serious injury came at the hands of Tanaka, who broke II's neck for which II vowed vengeance . . . II was hospitalized for several months after this injury yet, after a intensive rehabilitation program, returned good as new . . . Feels the mask represents goodness for all creeds and colors . . . Voted 1980 Most Popular

Wrestler by fans around the world . . . Won Wrestler of the Year honors several times . . . Became a rulebreaker for a very brief time when he and Tim Woods feuded . . . Always refers to this moment as the singlemost painful time of his life . . . Loves country and western music and cooking . . . Favorite color is white, not surprisingly . . . Collects cars . . . Several months ago, II went into retirement only to be lured back by the reign of . . . currently ravaging the state of Georgia . . . ambition is to unseat Harley Race for the NWA title . . . Currently advising young Ted DiBiase during the youngster's quest for a championship . . . Periodic color commentator along with Gordon Solie on Georgia Championship Wrestling.

CLOSE-UP

FAVORITE MANEUVER

"Oh, I am mighty proud of my kneebit! I have spent many, many hours perfecting this maneuver. Sometimes when I am in the gym, exhausted beyond belief, I push myself that little bit more, knowing this move must be great because my fans deserve only the very best."



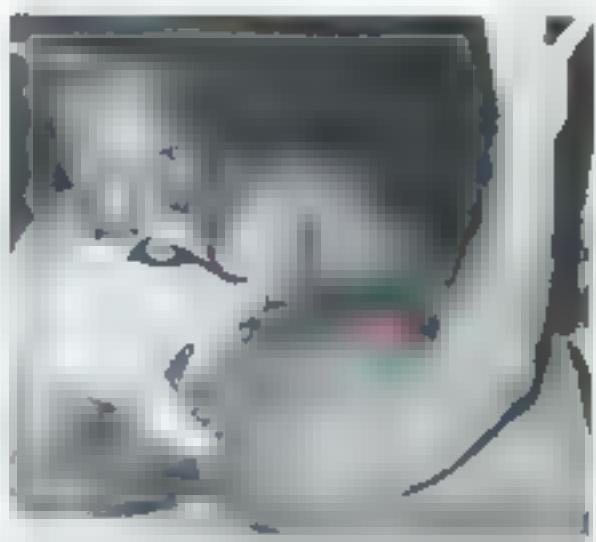
TOUGHEST MATCH

"It had to be against Abdullah the Butcher. Anytime you climb into the ring with Abdullah, you're putting your life on the line. That man has more hideous methods of torture than any man alive. He gave me my toughest match and I'm quite thankful I'm alive to enjoy it."



GREATEST MATCH

"I have to say last year's match against NWA champion Harley Race was the greatest. We went at it tooth-and-nail, never pausing, never coming up for air. All we wanted was each other's head on a spike. A guy like Race always gives a great match, but that one was surely my greatest."



MOST HATED

"Who else but the man who broke my neck? Yes, Professor Tanaka, a man who nearly ended my career... yes, I hate him so much. And I'm not the sort to toss around words like hate. I don't like to hate. But the memory of that night and that face makes my blood boil."

By Matt Brock

If you're a fan of professional wrestling, you know that I couldn't handle it. Ol' Matt

salary they do. Which means I have to ask for my check. If I don't, no one pays me and I learned last week my house has termites.

the stated concern. Masked Grappler, current North

MASKED GRAPPLER: GULF COAST HURRICANE

Special correspondent Matt Brock traveled to Louisiana simply to see Masked Grappler up close. Perhaps Matt wished he didn't. Rarely in wrestling has there been a man as cruel and depraved as Masked Grappler. What worries many is whether Grappler has become unstoppable.

PHOTOS BY STU SAKS



Killer Karl Kox desperately grabs for The Grappler's mask in an attempt to break an armlock (above). Though Kox has become a fan favorite in recent times, The Grappler's tactics drove him into a rule-breaking frenzy. A bloodied Kox pulls Grappler from the ring and attacks him with the bell (below).



federal crimes. But their after hours business doesn't concern me, unless they invite me, which means I must tell them I can't drive a getaway car since my license was revoked seven years ago for practicing three point turns on the Brooklyn Bridge.

Soon as I get into town I give Kox a call. Takes a while to get through. I figure he's giving another interview or something. Fifteen minutes goes by, I'm still on hold so I hang up and call again. Kox answers the phone and starts screaming at me how I hung up on him, no one ever hung up on him before, and if I want an interview, I should go do you know what before I'd ever get one again.

So far, not so good. To make matters worse, I find out an old girlfriend of mine is a grandmother with two 10-year-old grandsons. Course, she was much older than me when we dated, but you'll have to wait for my memoirs.

Maybe I was being remiss in not calling Grappler, but I thought I'd do this story on a different perspective, just hang back near ringside, try to be inconspicuous and all, just watch and see how this man operates.

At least I know I can make this following statement with utter confidence in its authenticity and validity. Masked Grappler is the cruellest wrestler I have ever seen. Ever, ever, ever. The man is a psycho, a sadist, a cruel, twisted, demented, whatever other word you want to throw in. This man should be put away in a very safe structure and the authorities should throw away the key.

He tried to maim Kox. Now, if you've ever seen one wrestler try to maim another, you know what I'm talking about. It is a sickening sight to behold. Not so much for any bloodshed because sometimes it isn't the bloodshed which turns the stomach. No, this operates on a deeper level.

Given, wrestling is the most violent sport in the world. But what



The Grappler is in his glory as Kox shouts out from the pain of his hamsterlock. Matt Brock found The Grappler to be a twisted, cruel, and sadistic man.

possesses someone like Masked Grappler to want to hurt?

"It gives me pleasure in inflict pain on others," explained Grappler. "I derive great satisfaction watching another human being, a person of lesser worth than myself, squirm and twitch and cry out in agony. I enjoy the screams as I twist a limb out of place. I revel in the shreks as I hear bones snapping apart."

"Nothing makes me happier than to torture another person. It is what I live for, giving pain to

others. I think it is quite a noble thing, to want to give to others. I could be selfish and want only for myself. I could not care about others. But I do. I want them to have all the pain in the world. I don't want them to be denied one excruciating sensation. I want them to feel the whole gamut of agony."

"Is there anything wrong with that? I think not. I think I am quite a wonderful human being to take the time to read books on inflicting pain, study up on the different

ways of torture, and exert my energies and my strength to go into the ring knowing I will spend precious minutes of my life giving pain on another person."

"Yes, I am sure someday I will be given a humanitarian award for my efforts. Until then, I must accept only the hideous ones of anguish as my reward."

Now I ask you friends. Would you rather have spent a night listening to that sick turkey, or burrowed through six pounds of chopped liver? I rest my case. □

***** WRESTLING *****

ENQUIREER

VALENTINE-WIZ PACT NEAR?



A GRAND ALLIANCE Sources indicate that a contract between top Mid-Atlantic rulebreaker Greg Valentine and WWF manager Grand Wizard is being negotiated. Valentine desires Bob Backlund's WWF belt.

BY STEVEN FARHOOD

NEW YORK, NY A high-level source in the Grand Wizard entourage disclosed feverish negotiations are underway between the flamboyant manager and rulebreaker Greg Valentine aimed at bringing the blond wrestler back to the WWF.

SETTLE BACKLUND FEUD

According to this source, Valentine believes his feud with WWF champion Bob Backlund has never been adequately resolved. Several East Coast matches ended inconclusively. While no money figures have been agreed upon, this source discloses a package of six-figures would be a reasonable assessment.

Sheepherders Fall

BY STU SAKS

RICHMOND, VA The Sheepherders often bragged about their own immortality and invincibility. They bragged how they'd never lose the Mid-Atlantic tag team title. Chalk up another boast to empty self-praise.

"Yeah, it feels mighty good to be champion," said George Wells who, along with Dewey Robertson, defeated The Sheepherders.

But The Sheepherders won't accept their defeat.

"They didn't whip us," one said. "We're still champs and we always will be."

Together Again

BY MATT BROCK

MINNEAPOLIS, MN—They were always buddies. Pals. Best of friends. But life has a way of separating even the closest of people. It did with Greg Gagne and Jim Brunzel. They went their own ways, devoted themselves to their own ambitions. But the lure of friendship and common competition proved too strong.

"Nothing will make me happier in the whole blasted world than for me and Greg to win the AWA tag team title from Jesse Ventura and Adrian Adonis," said Brunzel. "Not just for our egos, really, but because it would prove you can be friends and a quality tag team at the same time."

Sugar Returns

BY PETER KING

TAMPA, FL After a lengthy absence from the Florida wrestling arenas, Sweet Brown Sugar returns to the state determined to wrest away the Southern heavyweight title from Dick Slater.

"I don't like what that man does and what he stands for and just his whole way of life," said Sugar. "I want to thank all my fans for wantin' me back here in the great state of Florida and I want to assure all my fans that I'm gonna get Slater and mash his face into the ground."

AROUND THE GLOBE

RALEIGH, NC

Ric Flair awaits the results of an NWA inquiry to determine the legality of Roddy Piper's US title victory. Flair claims he was knocked unconscious with a foreign object.

SPRINGFIELD, MA

The immense hatred between Intercontinental champion Pedro Morales and Killer Khan showed through during the rattle as the two tried to cripple and maim each other. Fans are clamoring for a rematch.

COLUMBUS, GA

Jim Dillon tells local television viewers that his protege, the Mongolian Stomper, is ready to end Ted DiBiase's Georgia winning streak. DiBiase feels he must retain his streak to stay in the NWA top ten ratings.

OMAHA, NE

Crusher Blackwell says that it is in this fair city that he will dethrone Verne Gagne for the AWA heavyweight title. Crusher claims he has a legion of fans here and that their support is what will make all the difference in his performance the night of his title chance.

TORONTO, ONT

Rumors persist that Angelo "King Kong" Mosca will be signing with WWF promoters with hopes of landing a shot at Bob Backlund's WWF heavyweight title.



FLYING HIGH: The Freebirds Buddy Roberts, Michael Hayes and Terri Gordy claim to have no fear of their current number-one challengers, Ted DiBiase and Robert Fuller.

BY BILL APTER

ATLANTA, GA—The Fabulous Freebirds insist they are not at all disturbed by the rumbling threat of Georgia's newest tag team, Robert Fuller and Ted DiBiase. In fact, they maintain Fuller and DiBiase couldn't threaten, well, a bird.

"Fuller and DiBiase got together because no one else

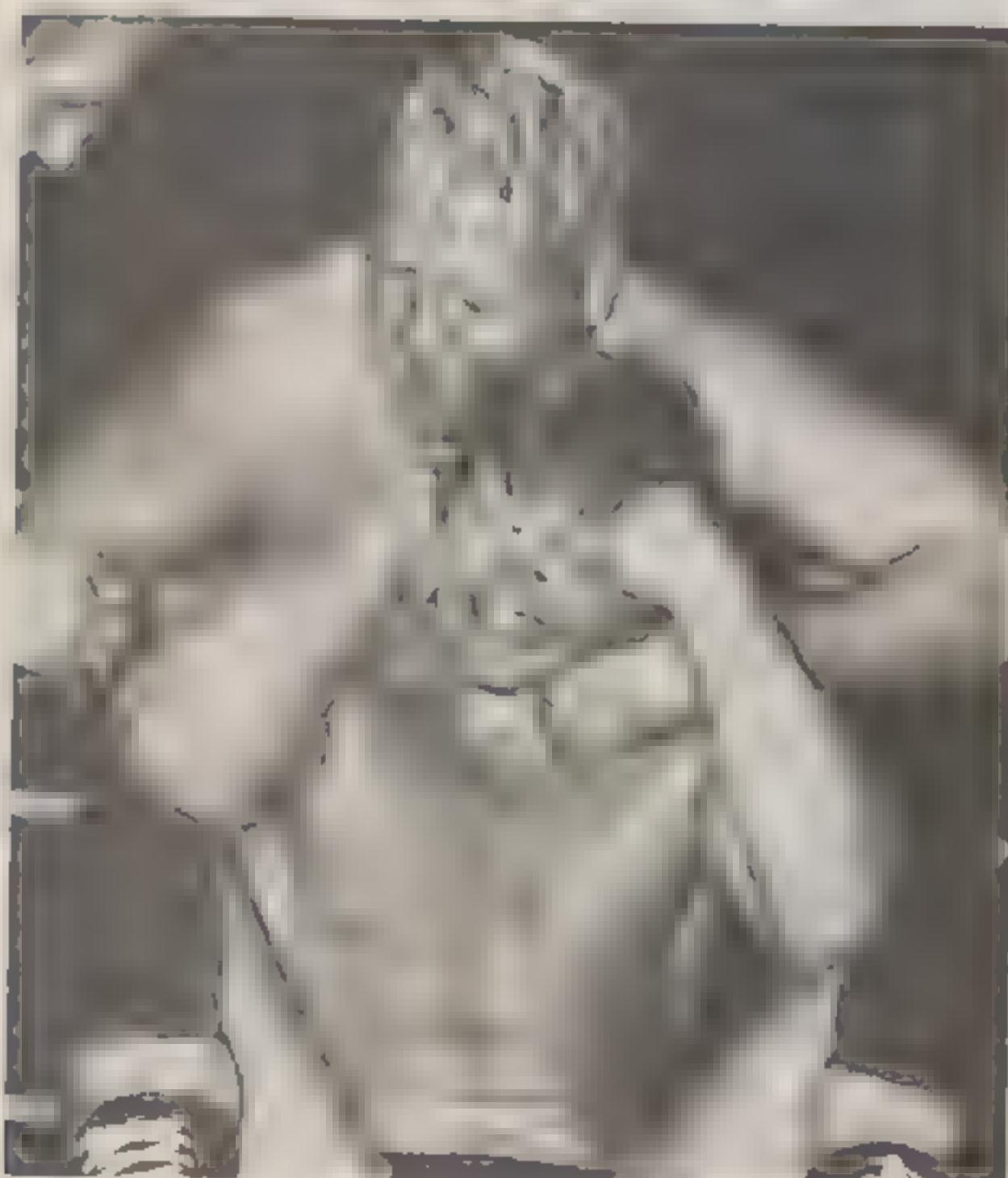
would have them," said Michael Hayes. "They can't wrestle, they can't talk, they can't walk. I'm surprised they're still around. Why would we give a good damn about ding-dongs like Fuller and DiBiase?"

Fuller and DiBiase, however, will not be swayed by The Freebirds' threats.

"We'll get 'em," insisted DiBiase.

LOOKING AT . . .

Matt Brock



The referee examines closely to make sure Dick Murdoch's grip on Bob Backlund is around the neck muscles and not the Adam's apple

WHO CAN REALLY hate a fun-loving rowdy who's been thrown out of every bar in the country? Well, not every bar, but it sure seems like it.

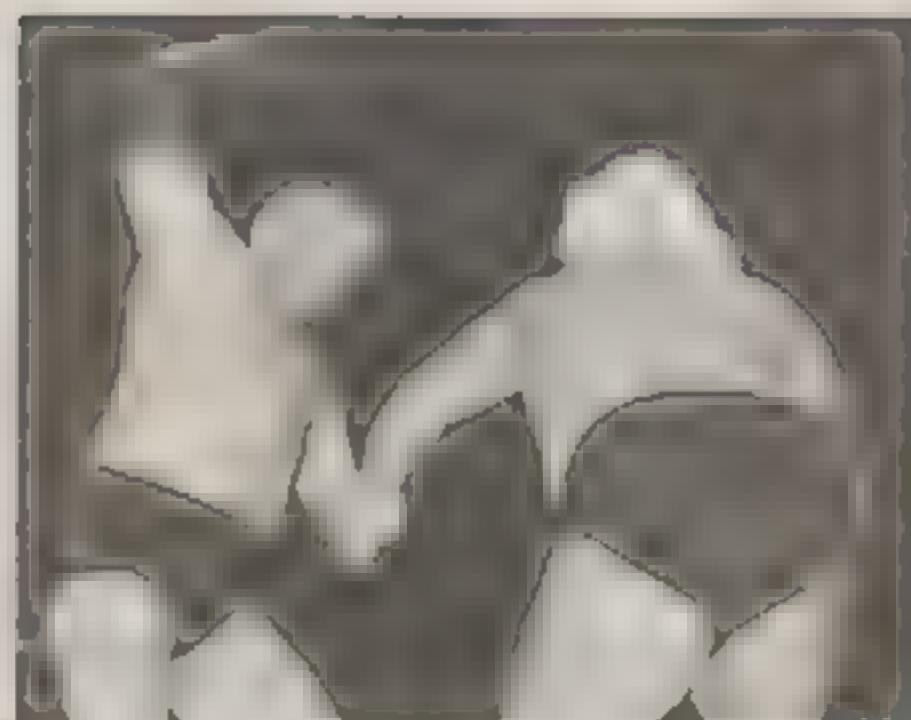
By all rights, I should come down hard on Dick Murdoch. I should call him a two-faced, two-bit bar and turncoat. I should rail against him from the highest barstool in the land. But I won't.

No, no, I can hear all you cynics out there chorusing about how Matt would say nice things about Jesse James because the outlaw liked straight whiskey. Not true. Jesse only drank bourbon. Just kidding. I'm in a playful mood. But let's turn serious.

I will concede the facts. Dick Murdoch has sold out his best friend Dusty Rhodes for a buck. Big bucks, to be sure, but money nevertheless.

What makes a man sell out his friends? Is it simply the money Murdoch cares about? No, I don't think so. Not that Murdoch can buy a Lear jet or anything like that. But I really don't think it was money which motivated Murdoch. I think there's a deeper, more compelling reason Murdoch would be ashamed to admit.

DICK MURDOCH



If Murdoch had defeated Harley Race (above left), he probably would not have been jealous of Dusty Rhodes, and their battles (above right) could have been avoided.

Murdoch is jealous of Rhodes. But Murdoch would never, never admit it. At least publicly. Or privately, even. Fact of the matter is, Murdoch probably doesn't even admit it to himself. He believes this grandiose lie he concocted for himself. He truly believes that all there is in life is money and that he'd make pacts with Satan himself for a few extra bucks.

Only by completely and totally swallowing such a lie could a man of Murdoch's principles deceive himself, bind himself enough so alliance with a thug and criminal

like Lord Al Hays becomes palatable.

Only by down-playing his friendship with Rhodes, first to himself, then to the world, time after time after time, could a man of Murdoch's infinite loyalties ever believe that love and friendship means so damn little.

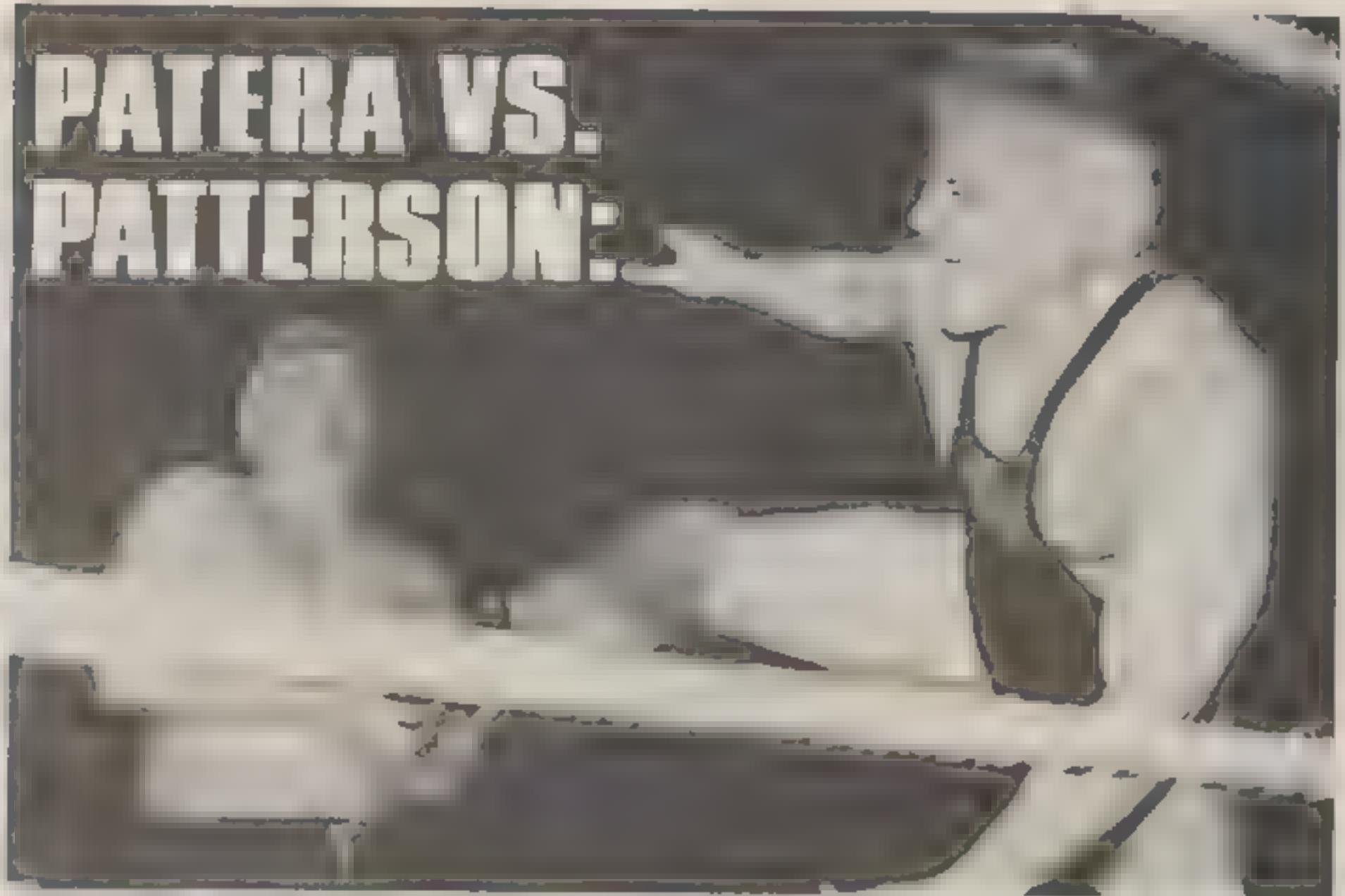
But this is the nature of Murdoch's self-deception. He would dare not permit any discord within himself for fear this deception would come undone and he would be forced to admit and then confront the truth. Murdoch

doesn't dare do that. He doesn't dare admit that former partner Dusty Rhodes has achieved more, at least in pure tangible terms, than he has.

No, Murdoch would never admit that. So his charade goes on. With each passing day, Murdoch believes his own he more and more. No longer can he tell the truth, distinguish between what he believes and what he doesn't.

Dick Murdoch is his own prisoner. He guards himself with lies. His sentence is a lifetime of guilt. □

PATERA VS. PATTERSON



WHO'S CHASING

BOOTH HOTLY DENY the charges. Both point an accusing finger at the other. Both bring forth friends willing to swear to their version of the truth. Both flatly insist that they are the real aggressor, that the other runs and flees like a cowardly animal.

But Ken Patera and Pat Patterson can't both be right. Or can they?

"I tell you, the thought of that guy Ken Patera makes my blood

boil and jump around my body like Mexican jumping beans," said Pat Patterson.

"Patterson? I thought I'd driven him out of the sport by now," said Patera. "But I would have, without any doubts at all, if he'd stand still long enough to fight like a man instead of the half-assed wimp and coward all the world knows him to be."

Patera and Patterson have never liked each other. Surely one does not invite these men to

the same dinner party. Or even, if possible, the same city at the same time. Their feud, many believe, began with Patera's pursuit of Patterson while the latter held the Intercontinental title.

"I hated Patterson long before that," said Patera. "I always thought he lowered the dignity of the sport. How can we continue to tout professional wrestling as the most grueling form of warfare in the world?"

Who is the aggressor in this bizarre and bloody story? Ken Patera insists his opponent races away from him. And, of course, Pat Patterson contends Patera flees his charge. As always, there is a kernel of truth in both stories. And an undercurrent of danger.

when we permit overweight, under-brained cretins like Pat Paterson to compete?

He can't wrestle and everyone knows it. It is my duty, as the strongest man in the world, and the wisest, as well, to drive this lower form of life out of wrestling so my shoes are not dirtied any further with his filthy blood.

Patterson claims to hold the same feelings for Patera.

"That's the thing, I, I do not like him, I tell you, I do not like that Ken Patera one bit. The way he wrestles, the way he cheats, the way he treats his opponents and the fans is enough to turn my stomach sick," said Patterson.

Their contempt, often long-distance, came together when Patterson reigned as Intercontinental champion. Night after night, Patera taunted the champion, saying he wasn't fit to do this or that and vowing to



After losing his Intercontinental championship to Pedro Morales, a frustrated Ken Patera sneak-attacks special referee Pat Patterson and applies his deadly swinging neckbreaker (above). Patterson skillfully escapes the same hold by kicking off the turnbuckles in their following grudge match (below).

WHO WON?



PHOTOS BY STU SAKS



Their purpose has gone far beyond the mere possession of a championship belt. Pat Patterson and Ken Patera share a common goal. And if this goal is reached, one man will not survive. Patera lifts Patterson off the ring apron and throws him into the ring (above). Patterson fires a series of rights to the top of Patera's head (below).



wrest away the championship

"I will never forget the day I lost my title as long as I do live," said Patterson. "It is one thing to lose a title which means so very much to you. It is another thing to lose it to a worm like Patera, to a man you know is not fit enough to call himself a professional wrestler much less to wear a title like the Intercontinental championship."

Not surprisingly, Patera defended the Intercontinental championship with contemptible valor, defying and defeating a wide variety of foes. Finally, Patera met his match when he became embroiled in a feud with Pedro Morales. And the former WWF champion sounded very much like Patterson when discussing Patera.

"He is not fit to be a champion, I am champion once, I know what it's like to wrestle hard and to have to be a model for little children. I no like that Patera and when we meet, he better be ready for any kind of action," warned Morales.

In their recent match at Madison Square Garden, Pat Patterson was special guest referee for the title bout between Morales and Patera. Quite strangely, Patera offered little resistance to Patterson refereeing the match.

"I can handle both of 'em," said Patera, shrugging.

Of course, Patera was to change his tune after the match. Morales demonstrated the skills and strengths which earned him worldwide recognition years back as WWF champion to seize the Intercontinental title from Patera. But that's only half the story. While Morales paraded the diamond-studded belt around the ring, Patera delivered a crushing blow from behind. He then went after a stunned Patterson, applying his deadly swinging neckbreaker.



Patterson prepares to turn Patera over into a Boston crab submission hold. Patera however summons his tremendous strength to avoid completion of the maneuver and the brutal match continues.

"I will get him for that," said Patterson. "He cannot get away with that, I will hunt him down and get him."

As for Patera?

"Patterson should be quickly disposed of, much in the manner you wrap up garbage and dump

it down the incinerator. You may get your hands dirty, but it can be washed away," he said.

Feuds which go on beyond the mere determination of a champion are the worst feuds of all. Even the most heinous rulebreaker will find his

despicable actions tempered by mere possession of the belt and all its attendant demands.

But the hate between Patterson and Patera has no boundaries, no limits, only an end. An end which will destroy someone's career. □

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**ON
ASSIGNMENT**

(Continued from Page 12)



Hansen is more comfortable in a wrestling ring than he is in front of a group of sharp 16-year-old basketball players from New York City.

at an imaginary target. "Stan Hansen? I'll kill the bum," he started to scream. "Where is he? I'll pay him back for breaking Sammartino's neck!"

The other kids were no less enthusiastic. Peter Thomas, my leading scorer, asked me if Hansen would play him one-on-one. Steven Hitz, a fanatical wrestling fan, wanted to run home and get his camera. I reminded him he lived four miles away.

Hansen strutted in at four on the dot. He obviously wanted to make an impression from the beginning, and he succeeded. The kids sat awe-struck and stared at him. Even Sean, who could talk through a nuclear bomb attack, was silent. Hansen took off his leather jacket, said hello to me, and assumed his position at the head of the group.

"Boys," he began, "my name's Hansen, and I'm one rough dude. But I didn't come here to prove how macho I am. I came to talk to you about some important things."

He went on to stress how important education was (he attended West Texas State University), how one must give 100 percent to everything he

does in life, and how a kid of 16 must, above all else, listen to the advice of his parents. After 10 minutes of this, he opened the floor for questions. That's when my kids, totally to my surprise, hit him with a full-court press.

"Mr. Hansen," Robbie asked, "if education is so important how come you've made a career out of crippling people instead of doing something constructive with your brains?"

"Hey Stan," Sean followed, "did your parents teach you to break every rule in wrestling, or didn't you listen to their advice?"

"Stan," Peter inquired, "how can you preach to us and expect us to listen when you say all those terrible things about Bob Backlund on TV?"

Hansen had no answers for those questions. At first he tried to fast-talk the kids, but he quickly realized it wouldn't work. Today's 16 year olds are pretty sharp. After a particularly demanding question by Steve, Hansen stormed away, cursing me on his way out.

By the way, my kids went out an hour later and played the game of their lives, winning by 25 points. Next week I'll try to line up Ken Patera to speak to them. □

KING'S COURT

(Continued from Page 6)

Piper vs Andre the Giant, 1977: A remarkable performance by Piper as he keeps the Giant off balance for nearly 30 minutes. Some people believe Piper is about to become the first man to pin the Giant when Piper slips over his own feet and tumbles from the ring.

Piper vs. Chavo Guerrero, 1979. A magnificent wrestling match. Piper is as quick as Guerrero. Once again, a freak mistake (this time Piper broke his big toe when he landed after delivering a perfect dropkick), denies Piper the victory.



Roddy Piper backs Ric Flair into a corner and throws a combination.

Very interesting, I thought as I replaced the Piper file in its canister. All these years we had considered Roddy Piper a top-notch grappler who just couldn't win the big ones. We never realized why he wasn't winning the big ones.

About this time, the first teletype reports of the Piper Flair match began to come into the office. But it was the headline which attracted my attention. It read, "Mistake-Free Match By Piper Nets Him U.S. Belt."

I guess Roddy Piper finally won the big one. □

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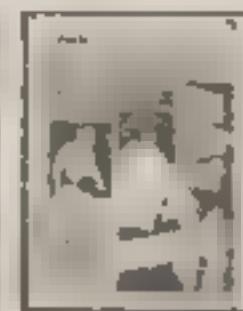
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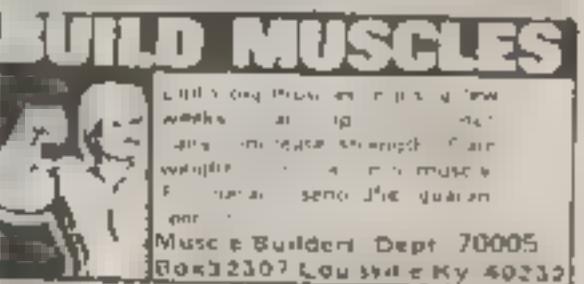
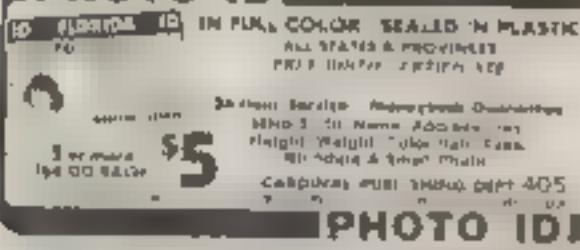
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DRESSING ROOM CONFIDENTIAL

(Continued from Page 10,



Associate Editor Stu Saks believes that by demanding an unreasonable amount of money for his wrestler to face Backlund, Fred Blassie has priced Hogan out of a title opportunity.

"If I had a problem with Blassie, and I'm not saying I do, I would be patient and try to deal with Fred as a human being, privately."

Forgetting Hogan's vicious ring tactics, you almost have to respect the man for the mature way he is handling the situation

I feel, however, that he's been patient long enough. He's not only beaten most of the top scientific wrestlers in the WWF he has dominated them. His skills, however brutal, are enormous. His physical stature is awesome. He stands 6-8, weighs 320 pounds, and he is

far from slow

Many feel Bob Backlund fears Hogan and is refusing his challenge. That is simply not true. "I'd welcome a match with Hogan," Backlund stated. "I know how good he is and that makes it all the more important that we meet. My reputation as a fighting champion rests on my meeting every worthy foe. And that certainly includes Hogan."

"If you want to know why the match hasn't been made, I suggest you talk to his manager."

Blassie, who is recuperating in the hospital after an alleged assault by Backlund and Arnold Skoaland, showed resentment toward my line of questioning. "I'm not going to let any geeks, especially the press, dictate my managing policy," he shouted. "I decide who my wrestlers will meet and for how much."

Blassie told his doctor to escort me out of his room when, naturally, I followed his comment with a question about the money.

So there, I feel, lies the answer. Blassie has failed to negotiate the worth of his wrestler in a title match. Thus no title match.

"I don't give a hoot about the money," says Hogan. "I'll make all the money I need when I'm champion."

But he is not champion. And he might never be champion as long as he allows Fred Blassie to guide his career. I talk nothing of the man's ring savagery. That is not the point of this particular column. I speak only of fairness. And if other men of less talent get title shots within a month or two of entering the WWF ratings, I see no reason why Hulk Hogan should be denied his just opportunity.

Fred Blassie's greed is stifling Hulk Hogan's career. And only Hulk Hogan has the power to change that. □

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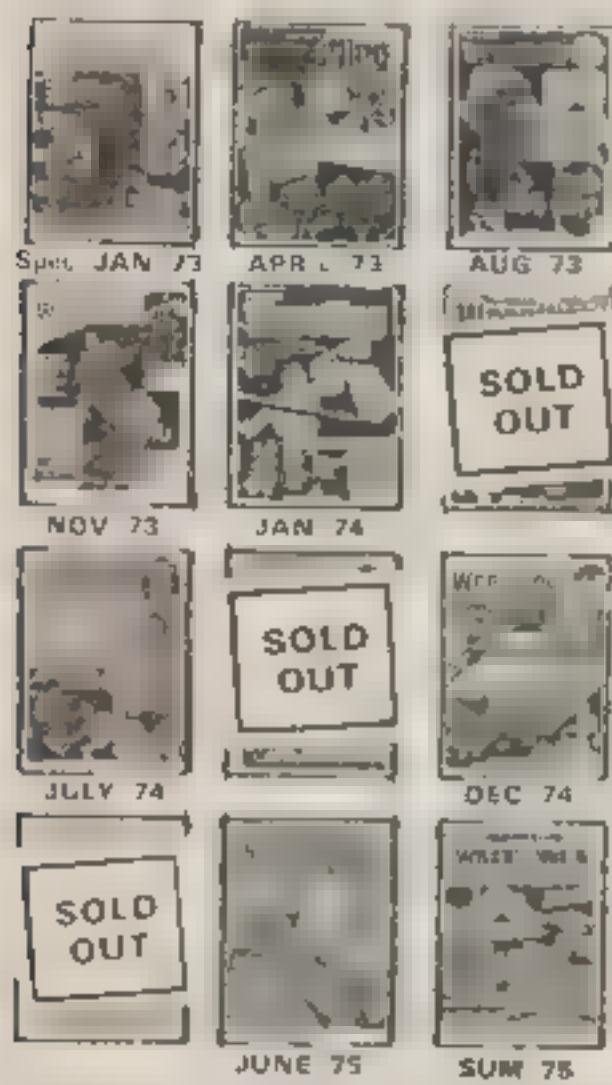
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MORGENSTEIN REPORT

(Continued from Page 18)

FLAIR GOES BAD?



RIC FLAIR

I have good sources in the Mid-Atlantic. A lot of honest people down there like and respect me and the feeling is mutual. When my most trusted source called me at five in the morning, I wasn't angry

Instead, my heart took off at the speed of light. I knew either he was in some drunk tank or he had one hot story for me. It was the latter. According to at least two different persons who did not know each other, Ric Flair is preparing to turn rule-breaker. These sources revealed Flair's horrible plan. Supposedly, Flair is waiting to put all potential enemies at rest, notably Rick Steamboat. Then Flair will turn on Steamboat during a match. Again, supposedly Flair will be aided in his plans with advice from a non-Mid-Atlantic manager and supported throughout the crisis, and perhaps beyond, by none other than former partner Greg Valentine. What do you fans think, believe it or not?

HANSEN DESPICABLE

Well, he's back. The man who loves to hurt. The man who loves to break necks. This man, Stan Hansen, fills me with contempt. I simply can't stand people who brag about hurting others. Certainly wrestling isn't a sport for the weak-hearted. But where is it written senseless brutality bordering on criminal depravity must be tolerated? Why should a man like Stan Hansen who, if he committed similar acts on the street would be serving a term of five-to-20 years, be allowed to perpetrate exactly the same sickening acts in the ring? I do not believe outside authorities should interfere in the sacred traditions of pro wrestling. Violence is an accepted and necessary part of wrestling. But within the rules



STAN HANSEN

When a man tries to cripple another after the match, or before, or even during, then pro wrestling should be subject to the same laws which govern society as a whole. Probably no one will listen to me, and Hansen, who once broke Bruno Sammartino's neck, will break another's neck using his insidious lariat hold.

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PRESS CONFERENCE

(Continued from Page 25)



"Instead of squandering my energy by running around in circles or by letting my temper drain my energies, I funnel everything I am in the Universe toward one objective."

said of violence: "Life is violent and so is man." I hope to use those words in the coming years.

SHOCKET. Sir, exactly what changes do you hope to achieve so that you may become a contender?

STEAMBOAT: Again, I'll ignore that thrust of your remarks, Dan. My level of concentration has never been higher. I want to assure all my fans that, when I get into the ring and maybe don't grab their paper and pencils for autographs, it has nothing to do with any changes I have toward them. Instead, I will be deep in the single-minded trance-like state known as Bingsoi.

MORGENSTEIN: And this does what, Rick?

STEAMBOAT: It will allow me to focus all my energies and all my ambitions on one subject. With this new skill, I can focus all my rage into a sword-like move aimed, say, directly at Greg Valentine's skull. Instead of squandering energy by running around in circles or by letting my temper drain my energies, I funnel everything I am in the Universe toward this one objective.

SHOCKET: Why the moustache?

STEAMBOAT: It's a ritual, secret once, back in the 14th century. Full members of this secret sect, whose name I am not allowed to speak, grew long beards which they tucked into the front of their shirts. But novice members could only grow a moustache.

APTER: And you are a novice?

STEAMBOAT: All are novices before the wonders of the Universe, Bill. When I have fully and completely understood, hence embraced, the mysteries of the Universe, then I will no longer be a novice. In that sense, at least.

MORGENSTEIN: Rick, thank you

STEAMBOAT: Thank you, and may the Universe unveil its mysteries to you.

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ought to buy one. At least then he'd own it legally. This way, the title is a badge of shame. Every time he walks into an arena with it, he'll remind people of his disgrace."

As the sun began to light Barry's motel room, the young grappler wondered if Funk was right.

Since then, Barry has defended his title against top challengers. He has wrestled with skill and dignity. No one can deny he has brought honor to the defense of his title.

Yet, the doubts still plague him. Barry knows better than anyone the differences between winning the title and defending it. It seems as if each match he has to prove himself anew.

Sadly, Jack Brisco has found it hard to continue their friendship. There is a barrier between them that neither man can overcome. Jack is not sure either one wants to overcome that barrier.

"I may have permanently wrecked our friendship," Jack mourns. "I should've realized what my interference would mean. When I saw Dory cheating successfully, blood pounded behind my eyes. I couldn't think straight. I never decided to interfere. I just did it. Even though it might mean our friendship, today I'd do it again. Funk doesn't deserve the title. I don't care how it was taken from him."

Barry Windham cares. He must defend the title in the ring and out. He has to prove himself worthy of a belt he didn't fairly win. Each match is a new test. Only time will tell if he ever feels himself worthy of the title, "Champion!" □

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WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

(Continued from Page 29)

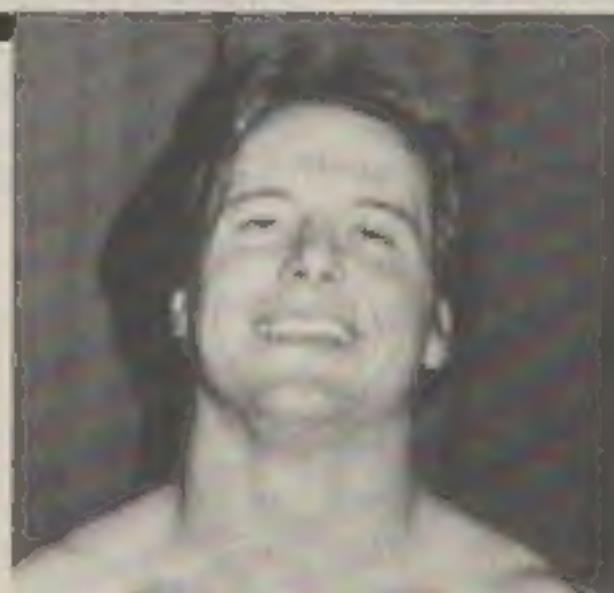
DORY FUNK JR.

"I was set up by worm Jack Brisco so his stooge Windham could steal the Florida heavyweight title from me. They paid the ref, they paid the officials, they bribed the timekeeper, and they probably paid off the guy who sells popcorn. But they won't get away with it. This is war!"



RODDY PIPER

"Ignorant fools like Ric Flair should learn to quiet their tongues and keep that fat blob of flesh affixed to the roof of their mouths, where undoubtedly it will serve them best. I would prefer Flair to quiet his foolish remarks and confine himself to wrestling, which he cannot do very well."



TOMMY RICH

"Okay, for a little while I was out of my tree. I didn't know what I was doing when I turned rulebreaker. I want to take this opportunity to say how very sorry I am for any harm or hurt I might have caused my fans. I hope everyone can forgive me. I really am sorry that this all happened."



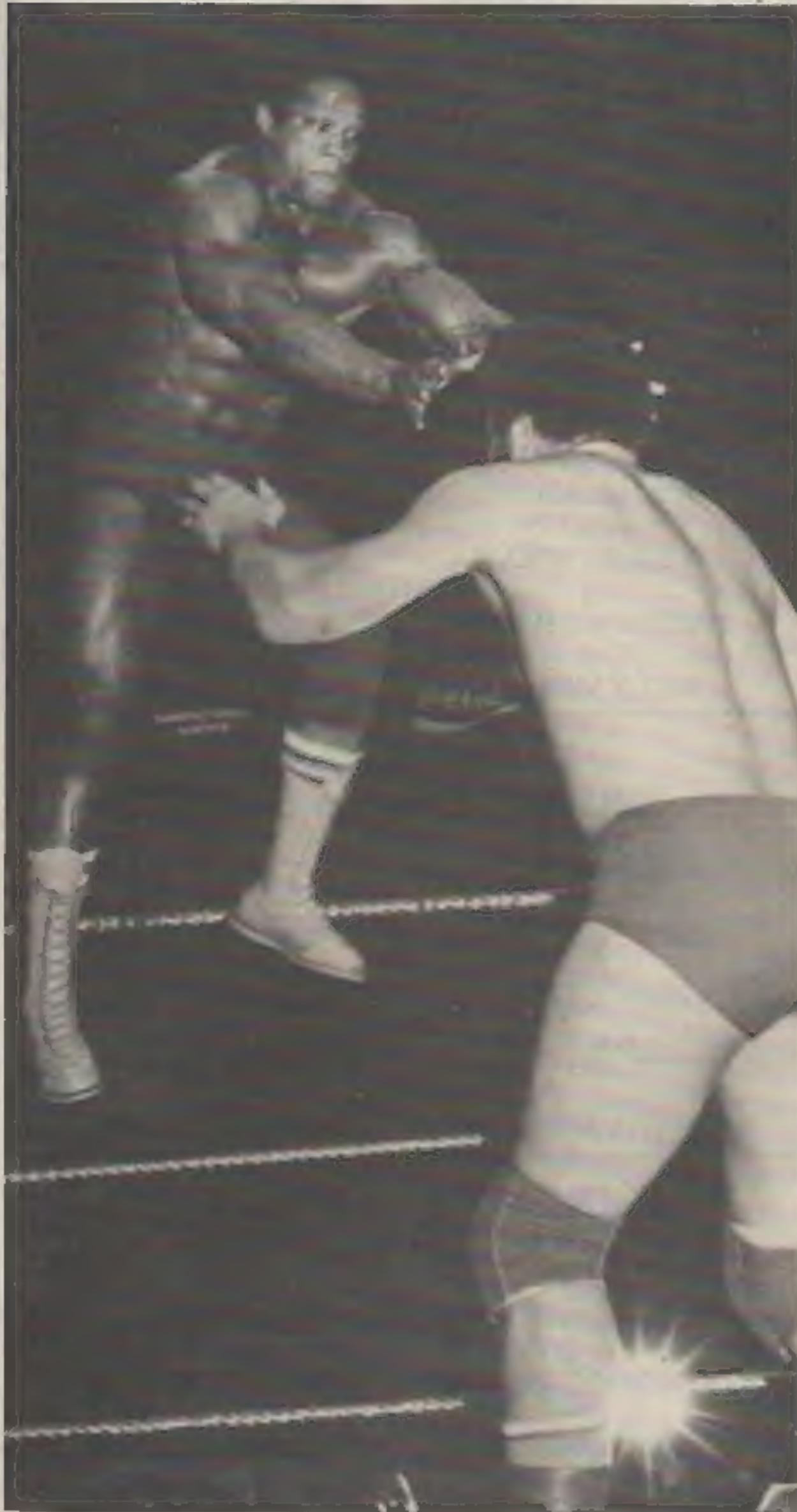
GINO HERNANDEZ

"I didn't ask for this war with the Von Erichs. I didn't want to hurt 'em. I really didn't. All I wanted was their ugly spoiled rotten kissers the hell out of this grand state of Texas. But they refused. So I had to wipe 'em out, one by one. History will say I did right."



ERNIE LADD

(Continued from Page 34)



Tony jumps from the top turnbuckle with a devastating flying headlock (above). Ernie uses his usual illegal tactics (top right), but he is unable to use the most important one—the bandaged thumb to the throat.



Ladd charged again. When he was within three feet of Tony, he jabbed with his thumb. This time, Atlas was ready. Exquisitely timed, he blocked the jab and sent it backwards. The thumb smacked in Ladd's windpipe.

Ernie didn't know whether to be surprised or hurt. His best weapon had been turned against him. Was it a fluke? Using all his guile, he jabbed again. Once again, the thumb was sent back into his own throat.

That explained Tony's exercises. The young grappler had been conditioning himself, perfecting his reflexes. To turn Ladd's weapon upon himself, Tony had to be in perfect condition, able to move with instant accuracy. His success proved his reflexes were lightning sharp.

For the rest of the match, Ladd never used his thumb as a weapon. It was a wild and brutal battle, nonetheless. When it was over, ending in a draw, even the spectators were exhausted from the excitement.

Atlas was delighted. He'd beaten Ladd at his own game. Yet the look on Ernie's face as he left the arena said that although the match was over, the war had just begun. □